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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001078

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: LABOR LEADERS IMPRESS STAFFDEL WITH CANDID TALK OF
LABOR MOVEMENT AND WORKERS, STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE IN A
CRASHING ECONOMY

REF: A. HARARE 946

[1](#)B. HARARE 1010

[1](#)C. HARARE 077

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) A congressional staff delegation visiting Zimbabwe came away from a meeting with two prominent labor leaders impressed with their candid discussion of the fractured state of the opposition movement and sobering description of the daily challenges workers face in Zimbabwe's severely depressed economy. The labor leaders discussed the importance of a unified opposition, and suggested the easiest way for the opposition to get back on track and reenergize the base was to focus on one issue alone - "poverty." End Summary.

The Opposition Movement - "A Toothless Bulldog"

[1](#)2. (U) The staffdel included: House International Relations Committee staffers Gregory Simpkins and Pearl-Alice March, as well as, Senate Foreign Affairs Committee staffer Heather Flynn. On August 25, they met with two of Zimbabwe's leading labor activists, Gertrude Hambira, General Secretary of the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) and Raymond Majongwe, Secretary General of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ). The two activists described to the staffdel the disunity of the opposition party, the weakness of the labor movement, and the

dire economic straits of Zimbabwean workers.

13. (C) Hambira said that the opposition movement, which had grown out of the labor movement, was in danger of appearing as a "toothless bulldog" given a string of unfulfilled promises of mass action and missed opportunities to take the government to task over its failed policies. She noted in particular the absence of reaction to Operation Murambatsvina ("Restore Order") (ref A) and to the recent currency exchange program which had severely impacted Zimbabwe's poorest citizens (ref B).

14. (C) For his part, Majongwe pointed to competing personalities and strategies in the opposition leadership for the lack of decisive action. Asked by the staffdel what the opposition could do to foment protest, Majongwe remarked that the opposition lacked a single message that resonated and inspired; instead the leaders continued to highlight dull issues, such as unfair taxes and levies for undelivered benefits. Mujongwe recommended, with Hambira nodding in approval, that all the civil society groups focus their message on one simple and hard hitting theme - "poverty." Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), an opposition group that was successfully attracting public support, had done so because its leaders only addressed bread and butter issues like the rising cost of food, school fees, and medical care for children.

15. (U) In terms of the labor movement, both Hambira and Majongwe lamented how tough economic conditions and high unemployment had sapped labor's dues-paying membership base and constrained its ability to pursue crucial labor activities. Consequently, labor groups were increasingly

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becoming social welfare organizations rather than promoters and protectors of worker's rights. Hambira said GAPWUZ representatives were also increasingly hindered from gaining access to farms to organize workers. In a follow-on meeting, she told Embassy officers that the union's representatives had been continually denied access to farms owned by prominent government officials, including Godfrey Chidyausiku, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and Jocelyn Chiwenga, wife of Zimbabwe Defense Forces Commander General Constantine Chiwenga.

The Struggle to Survive

16. (U) Hambira explained to the staffdel that the vast majority of Zimbabweans could barely make ends meet as wages failed to keep pace with skyrocketing prices. Illustrating the crisis, she noted that school fees per child/term were about Z\$10 thousand (or about US\$15 at the parallel market rate) in the rural areas, while the minimum wage for a farm worker was Z\$4 thousand/ month (or about US\$6/ month at the parallel market rate). Consequently, many farm workers were opting for subsistence farming and selling what little surplus they could grow to generate income, rather than labor on a farm for less than a living wage. Hambira added that only the party elite had benefited from land seizures while the workers were now actually suffering worse working conditions and relatively lower pay than before with many farmers, including Vice President Joice Mujuru, refusing to even pay the agreed upon minimum wage.

17. (U) Hambira said labor leaders had also met strong resistance from business representatives during the recent Tripartite Negotiation Forum (TNF) talks when they sought to link the minimum wage to the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) (ref C). The TNF talks, which bring together government, business, and labor to discuss ongoing economic and social challenges facing the country, are in danger of collapsing as business and labor have been unable to come to an agreement over the PDL impasse. The PDL, a number calculated as the

minimum required for a family of six to pay basic expenses, is currently set at Z\$84 thousand/month (or US\$130/ month at the parallel market rate).

Comment

18. (C) The labor leaders poignantly highlighted the grim daily reality of working Zimbabweans, particularly compared to the country's recent past as Southern Africa's breadbasket. They also made a strong argument that an effective and unified opposition was critical to turning the country around. In response to concerns like these, Morgan Tsvangirai, President of the anti-Senate faction of the

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Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led an unauthorized march of 500-1000 people September 1, including 40 senior members of his faction, on Parliament to deliver a petition protesting Zimbabwe's growing political and economic crisis. (Septel) End Comment.

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